DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 155 SP 006 940

AUTHOR	Bower, Eli M.
TITLE	Teachers Talk About Their Feelings.
INSTITUTION	National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md. Center for Studies of Child and Family Mental Health.
REPORT NO	DHEW-HSM-73-9032
PUB DATE	73
NOTE	41p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402 (Stock No. 1724-00291 $.35)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Beginning Teachers; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Behavior; Teacher Morale; *Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

In preparation for this publication, 16 young teachers from different grade levels and different school districts were invited to meet in group discussions and speak about their experiences. All sessions were taped; the transcript was edited and organized to show the moment of passion, crises, and growth of new teachers. The tape extracts have been grouped into seven sections whose subject headings reflect major themes of the discussions: That First Year, The Kids, The Administration, The Staff, The Parents, The System, and The Teachers Themselves. (Editors/JA)

ED 083155

TEACHERS TALK ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS

Eli M. Bower
University of California at Berkeley

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

National Institute of Mental Health
Center for Studies of Child and Family Mental Health
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20852

SP 006 940

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

This publication was written by a recognized authority in the subject matter field under contract number NIH 70-74 from the National Institute of Mental Health. The opinions expressed herein are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the National Institute of Mental Health or the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

DHEW Publication No. (HSM) 73–9032
Printed 1973

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402. Price: 50 cents, domestic postpaid; 35 cents, GPO Bookstore
Stock No. 1724–00291

Foreword

The National Institute of Mental Health, with child mental health as its number one priority, recognizes that teachers are a major mental health resource in our Nation. During their school age years our children are strongly influenced by their teachers 30 hours a week for 40 weeks a year. This influence is not only in education, but in the child's experience with human relations and in his social and emotional development.

Whether teachers are kind or hostile, helpful or uncaring, they exert a profound influence upon the mental health of the children they teach. Thus, the mental health of our teachers—their satisfactions, frustrations, problems, and needs—is immensely important. In this report, 16 young teachers, new to their profession, speak freely about teaching as they have experienced it, and express their reactions to the problems they encountered. What they said was taken from tapes and edited to insure their anonymity. The tapes were recorded during group discussion sessions with Dr. Eli M. Bower, professor of education and psychology at the University of California at Berkeley.

This is an unusual and frank account from some young teachers concerning their feelings during their early days in the classroom. From this account of what these teachers experienced and felt, we in mental health and in education, and those of us who are parents of school-age children, may better understand what other teachers may also be experiencing in their schools and how they feel about teaching as a job and as a possible career.

Such understanding may, in turn, provide the basis for discussion among both professionals and lay people, which hopefully will lead to more satisfying teaching experiences for many beginning teachers in the future.

BERTRAM S. BROWN, M.D.
Director
National Institute of Mental Health

Preface

New teachers are low on the totem pole and high on ideals. They are usually fresh, eager, imaginative, and energetic. They are sometimes foolhardy. They want to do good—to be better and best. They want to be good teachers.

What does a teacher face when he or she moves into the profession? The transition from practice teacher or teacher in training to full classroom responsibility is not easy. There, facing the new teacher, are the 20 or 30 or more children, waiting for learning or resolved to resist it. There are the principals and the supervisors who are constantly evaluating. There are the more experienced teachers, disposed to be helpful, condescending, scornful, or disinterested. There is the "system" to be learned about and to be dealt with. There are the parents, who can be supportive, suspicious, challenging, or in need of help themselves.

Teaching is, at best, a tough job. After a few years, sometimes after only one or two, some young teachers are unable to define their own emotional rewards in their jobs. Others have grown so discouraged or become so frightened that they cease individual effort or innovative thinking. They try to be as efficient and competent as possible while following the lines of least resistance and least anxiety.

What can be done to strengthen and support our young teachers to maintain mental health, enthusiasm and zest in a system which seeks to mold people to fit that system?

In the hope of finding some of the answers to this question, we invited 16 young teachers from different grade levels and different school districts to meet in group discussions for 2 hours every other week from October 1969 to May 1970. They spoke of their experiences as they began their jobs, worked with others in the school, met parents, encountered obstacles, and discovered new things about themselves.

All sessions were taped and reaudited. Out of them emerged consistent themes, moments of passion, crises, and growth. The resulting transcript was edited and organized into a short document which is, in essence, *a* new teacher describing her experiences to the reader.

Names have been changed, incidents restructured, and content digested. Everything necessary has been done to insure the teachers' anonymity.

There are no heroes or villains in this presentation. School administrators, parents, teachers, children all seek the best for each other, the school, and the community, in spite of methods that are sometimes faulty.

Perhaps these honest disclosures—a small sampling from a limited geographic area—may initiate inquiry and discussion about classroom situations and the feelings of beginning teachers. They may thus prove helpful in our search for some new ways to protect the best in our people, our teachers, and our children, as well as the best in our schools.

ELI M. BOWER
University of California at Berkeley

Contents

	Page
Foreword	iii
Preface	v
That First Year	1
The Kids	6
The Administration	11
The Staff	16
The Parents	21
The System	26
Themselves as Teachers	31

That First Year

When I first started teaching I went out and bought these long dresses—my clothes were all mini length. I had this thing about looking grown up. I felt that's what a teacher's supposed to look like. But then my best friend at school got pregnant and kept on wearing mini dresses and everybody said how cute she looked. Here was this really grown-up person being herself. Since then I've worn whatever I'd wear anyplace else. It's a symbolic thing. I just went back to being myself.

. . . . .

I had trouble with skirts too. At the beginning of the year my kids said things like, "Gee, it must be going to be really warm today." Finally I said, "Okay, let's talk about it; does this bother you? What do you want me to wear?" One of them said, "Well, we had this teacher last year who was about 65 and she talked to herself and wore these dresses down around her ankles. We're not used to seeing a teacher's knees." And we all laughed and felt better and I wear what I want.

. . . . .

This is my first year. I teach in a mixed middle class school. We have these kids on tranquilizers. I think this is going to be my last year in the district for sure.

. . . . .

I was just a young teacher; I didn't know what to do. OK, I was ignorant, but I became so afraid and defensive—I'd find myself asking for quiet and not having anything to say when I got it. I felt it was totally my fault, what went on in there. I would have been great in a morgue. I guess what happened to me was that I got to see their point; I got to see myself the way they saw me.

. . . . .

The first year the most important thing to me was winning

the kids' approval. Now I can look back and say, OK, I don't need it; I can be a good teacher without everyone liking me.

. . . . . .

I went in with the idea that if you're dependent on the kids' approval you'll never teach anything because one day they'll like you and the next they'll hate you. I did all the things they're always telling first year teachers to do—be very mean at first, really bear down. I wore long dresses and everything. I was really mean and strict. About 30 kids wanted to transfer out of my class. It took me until this year to loosen up.

. . . . . .

I've had to learn how free I could be. That's the hardest thing for a new teacher. At first everybody worked. I thought, man, this is neat—everybody does what they're told. Then I thought, what a bore. It's no fun. And I got a little too free. Now I know they can sense when I start setting my jaw even before I know I'm doing it. They know when to settle it down. The hardest thing for me was to learn how to balance teacher control and class freedom.

. . . . . .

In our school we have a nice set-up for new teachers. They get the best of everything and the older teachers are the ones who move around room to room. If you can stand your first year, they tell you, you'll come back and the next year you'll get a little better class. But I came in the middle of the year and got 23 children from fifth grade classes who hadn't been making it in the regular classrooms. They put us in a portable [classroom] next to special education classes and the third day there were four-letter words written on the door in human excrement.

. . . . . .

This is a decent philosophy of education? To either keep a new teacher in a kind of womb for a while or throw her to the wolves? Either is unethical and poor education.

. . . . . .

What I had to find out was how comfortable I was and how much I wanted to give. It took me a while to figure that out. Then I realized that the more I was *me* in the classroom, the better off I was and the better off the kids were. The more

I could say, look, this is me and if you don't like me we'd better do something about it, the easier it was. It was just the opposite of what the older experienced teachers were telling me—stay away from your kids and you'll have no problems. I just tell them how much I can give them, and when it gets too much, I just say I can't go any further.

. . . . .

The first day I told my class to write two paragraphs, answering in the first "What is the most important thing I can know about you?" and in the second, "What's the most important thing about me you should know?" Most of them wanted to know what teed me off, what would make me explode. They know that every teacher has a boiling point. It's the first day and we're all being friendly. So I said, "I guess it would be a child pushing too far or answering back when I'm trying to be honest." We discussed it. Now they know what to expect and they're happy with that.

. . . . .

When I walked into my job I was told by the university to go over to this high school and ask for two nice geometry classes because that's the place to learn. Good students make you learn. The principal brought in the head of the math department. He had a big book with every darn problem worked out and I said to myself, this guy doesn't know beans. "You want to become a teacher?" he said. "Yes, that's why I'm here." "OK, I'll give you a class." He conned me into a class that had driven a first-year teacher out of his job. They put firebombs in his room and water traps on the floor; they set booby traps in his desk. I said, "Look, I'm here; you're going to learn something. If you want to give me some hangups, I'll fight you just as hard as you want to fight me." We did this for a couple of days. I was honest. I'd sit in the middle of the room with them or I'd sit on their desks. They pulled all the old stunts. I cheated in high school; what they were doing wasn't new to me. I have a temper and I'd yell at them. I didn't argue. If there was a confrontation, I'd say, "Shut up and we'll finish this later!" That's where I learned to be a teacher.

. . . . .

Let me tell you what I walked into. I was a student teacher and the head of the department called me at home and asked me if I'd start right then in a junior high. They needed a teacher and they'd work out my not having a credential. I said I'd think

about it. I was a little scared. I talked with a couple of master teachers and one said, "Take it, it's money." I took the job. I walked into that class, and the kids told me they'd gone through 12 substitutes. Those kids were beautiful but I had no idea what I was doing. The next day I quit.

. . . . . .

I walked into my first class cold. They were all problem kids, but I didn't know that. Their previous teacher had been drafted and had left the country. He was a specialist in problem kids. So I started giving them, "This is what you will do now,"—these kids who hated to do anything. I almost threw up my hands in despair but everything worked out. I just opened the class up. I got to know some of the kids pretty well. There was one, one of the toughest in the whole school, who did something and I yelled at him and he started to cry. He cried for 45 minutes. I walked out with him and sat on the grass for an hour, hearing about his father. We did great things in that class. They decorated the room and did all kinds of things with poetry and art.

. . . . . .

I've considered leaving teaching. I began by saying teaching is marvelous—I've never done anything so fantastic in my life, and I really felt that way. But by the end of the year I was so unhappy with everything I considered maybe I should leave. I feel better, this minute, anyway. Today was just fine. You know, it isn't really just one day, though one bad day can make many days miserable. It's not the kids; I get along very well with kids. It's not the adults, either. But there are days when I really would like someone to come to my room, watch me, and say, *"Oh marvelous! I've never seen a better teacher!"* You know, maybe once every 2 weeks someone could do that for me and it would make my 2 weeks. It's silly, I suppose, but I guess I need approval from other people.

. . . . . .

My first day they showed me my classroom in a portable that looked like pre-World War I. The windows were boarded up and there weren't any sinks. There were two ancient coal stoves in the corner and the grime was an inch thick. I spent the whole week scrubbing with my rubber gloves and buckets of water I toted from the teachers' restroom. Later I found out that the other teachers were all laughing at me because the dirt seeps right back and it was just as bad a week later. The

teacher who'd left that portable the year before had taken everything that could possibly be of use in a teaching situation. Most teachers go into their permanent classrooms and there may be display boards, chart hangers, a motion picture screen, felt boards, something. But in my room—nothing. I spent my first few months scrounging around for materials.

These conditions make you fail as a teacher. How can you do your best when you're working under the worst circumstances possible? That just doesn't make sense to me.

The Kids

I was teaching one class and our communication was so beautiful it was incredible. Every day, this rewarding, fantastic class. We'd sit and talk about the purpose of education. You know, we were friends. They'd say, "Can I call you tonight?" And I had another class and I was a rag—a nothing where they were concerned. They just ripped me to shreds. I would go home and feel like a complete failure and cry. I mean, my one success did not erase the ego beating I experienced in this other class. And I couldn't, I just couldn't, go back to it. Finally I came up with the idea of letting them write anything they wanted and I'd have it dittoed and published and circulated around the school. It really helped. But, you know, I think it was just because it was at the end of the school year.

. . . . . .

I think sometimes I take things too personally, with kids. But you can't be completely impersonal. Attacks are made on you all the time, personal attacks. Attacks that children make are extremely personal. They have no compunction about speaking about the way you look or talk. They really can dehumanize you and you can have a terrible time reacting.

. . . . . .

When I have a kid sitting there and I look at him and I hate him just because of the look on his face—the way he's looking at me—I take him aside after class and say, "Look, is it me or is it you? Why do you look at me that way?" It almost always comes off that the kid is having a bad time somewhere and we talk about it. He's nicer and I'm nicer. It works if you both personalize it.

. . . . . .

I came into education because I had this crusading view. I'd been working with kids in trouble with the police, and I thought, maybe I could do something to keep children from getting into trouble. And last week I had my first failure. One of my kids went to Juvenile Court. The thing is, every day a

child will come from behind a locked door—and those are rather intense limits. You have to say, I have 20 mirrors standing there looking at me, and I'd better at least acknowledge that this is a reflection of me, whether it's the one I like or not.

. . . . .

I'm learning to use the group as a social unit and they're taking the lead. The tough kids don't hassle me and the others follow their lead. But there are times when I'll walk into a class and the kids just won't like me that day. It really has nothing to do with you. There are days when a third of the class is having a bad day and it's contagious. They just don't like you; in fact they hate you. What I've learned to do is laugh it off. I'll say, "You're in good form today; I can see that you really love me." One girl just made faces at me for a week. Finally I called her up to my desk and said I hated to have faces made at me; it made me feel bad. So either she'd stop or I'd have to transfer her out because it hurt my feelings. She just never did it again. I think she didn't like her face either, because now I tell her she looks nice and she even smiles.

. . . . .

Don't you think our attitudes and feelings come from the children? I know that some days they respond to me and I feel on top of the world. And maybe the next day, I'll ask them the same thing and they won't give me an answer. That exhausts me. But I get tired from being on top of the world, too. I go home after a day of just fantastic teaching, where it worked, really worked, and I could just fall apart, I'm so tired from being that high. The role is exhausting, any way you play it.

. . . . .

This year a lot of kids came in from other schools, from rougher, more undisciplined groups. In the first week we weren't prepared for them. Class sizes got out of hand. There were fights, some racial friction. Kids were constantly being shaken down. Fires were started all the time; many times the school day starts out now with a fire. I get basic kids who don't know how to read. A lot of them are over 14 and they're still in the seventh grade, big kids. We wrote a special proposal for a reading program, reading and English combined, with the same class for two periods in a row. It was a battle, a battle we lost all the time. Finally I looked at the office files. Many of these kids had been restricted to 1 hour a day the year

before. Physical, violent kids. They would throw scissors with such force they'd stick in the board. We ended up yelling. No kind of teaching could go on. We went to the community worker, the counselor, anybody, saying "help." Some of the worst got themselves eliminated because they were just not able to continue. What about the rest? If they don't get help right away, they're going to drop out. I want to try to teach them something. But I'd get to the point where I'd be watching myself like a third person.

. . . . . .

I teach in a high school in a middle class community. We don't have problems like that, but we have three kids on tranquilizers going to psychiatrists three times a week. I also have gifted kids.

. . . . .

I am the teacher for the educable mentally retarded at my school. I have ninth through twelfth grades. My kids have acute heart conditions, brain damage, neurological problems. One of my boys has a congenitally deformed elbow, knee, and ankle. As if that wasn't enough, he was hit in the head with a golf club on a backswing when he was two. He's now blind in one eye, neurologically impaired in the other, and deaf in one ear. You know, you can't explain enough of the implications of that kid. They call the kids in my class the mentally retarded—I don't know what that means. Try putting them in categories; everybody does. All I know is they're a bunch of kids who get along well together, and learn what they can.

. . . . . .

I have a class of kids who pass knives and pick their teeth with them every day.

. . . . . .

The concern of the administration at my school at this point is a bulk of kids, maybe more than a hundred kids, who mingle in the halls or the quad. We try to avoid riots and sit-ins.

. . . . . .

I teach reading in the seventh grade and I'm faced with situ-

ations in which I find myself being pushed so far by the kids that I'm somebody so completely different I don't even recognize me as me. I'm really afraid I'm getting out of control, finding myself faced with too many stresses. Discipline, discipline, first of all.

. . . . . .

I've seen what you're talking about. I have the low math students. I have the drug problems. Today I didn't finish my lunch; I ate it in the classroom. I mean, maybe you do these things; maybe you don't. If I'm hungry I'm going to eat; if a kid's hungry he'll eat. I don't hand out passes. If the kid wants to go to the bathroom, go to the bathroom. If he wants to cut, he'll cut. Or if he wants to come out of the cold, my room's a place to sit, even if he's not one of my kids. These other problems bother me.

. . . . . .

Remember the kid who hit the cop on that truck coming out of the mountains going through the residential district? I had him in one of my classes.

. . . . . .

I was in trouble all year long, with my kids. A girl pulled a razor blade out in class and tried to slit her wrists. A boy called me on the phone and said he was going to shoot himself that night. These things shake you up. I come from a straight middle class background and I don't really know how or what to feel about kids absolutely so strung out on dope that they can't see straight. I try to teach them and to like them but I find it hard to do either.

. . . . . .

This week two of my girls were looking really funny. I went over and said so. "Why, what do you mean, funny?" one of them said. "You look zonked out," I said. "Did you drop something?" She said, "How did you know?" I said, "Well, you know, I live in a place where it's not unknown." She said, "Yes, we both have. We don't know what they were. You're not going to tell, are you? They were pills." I said, "No, I'm not, because it won't do any good. You've already taken them. But as soon as you feel sick, let me know." I'm in the hideous position of knowing the pills were taken but I'm also the teacher. I can tell them what LSD 25 does, tell them what other stuff does, break

down and cry telling them what it's done to other kids. They just don't care. They think, "It happened to somebody else; it won't happen to me." They're looking for something I can't give them by telling them what it's done to other kids. They're not going to stop and listen until they find that other thing. I don't know what it is—perhaps a feeling of playing with dynamite and escaping with your life. Relevance is the word we hear. It's not relevant to their lives, to the lives of these kids.

The Administration

I think the perfect cartoon of a principal is a very frightened man out on a cold day with few clothes on, about to dip his toe in cold water. They're frightened of getting wet or jumping into anything. Perhaps communities make them that way—playing safe is safest. But it sure doesn't encourage me to try anything new or even think about it anymore. I feel sympathy for him, but I'm frustrated, too. He's supposed to evaluate me but he's never observed me teaching, never once. A vice-principal or visiting principal would come in but my principal would sign the evaluation. They write up all these stupid things that have nothing whatsoever to do with you as a teacher. It's all so much nonsense.

. . . . . .

I came close to fist fighting with my principal this week. He passes as a liberal; I mean that's the appearance he likes to give. And I had an argument with him and I found that the way he would fight me was to deny my femininity by implying that what's wrong with me is that I'm too aggressive. There was a time when that statement would have bowled me over. I'd have said, "Oh, wow, I'm really sorry." No more. I know I'm a woman and I don't need him to tell me I am or how to act like one. Then he said I should go down and talk to the superintendent; I was the only one he knew could deal with *him*. From what I've heard from other teachers and a guy in the union who's dealt a lot with the superintendent, he's a lot more reasonable than the principals make him out to be. They paint him into a corner and use their own image of him.

. . . . . .

My principal got thrown because I had *Walden* by Thoreau available for my students. There was campus trouble at the time, and even though he'd never read *Walden*, he decided I was teaching civil disobedience. We were told we had to teach exactly and precisely according to the curriculum and use the State reader—sixth grade level—with kids reading at much higher levels. It's safe, but it's a lot of nonsense. My kids say all you learn from the State text is to fill in the right blanks

and it doesn't teach you anything about what life is like. They do the workbook in 5 minutes and read those silly little stories in 5 minutes and then what do you do with the rest of the time, with these kids that are really eager for learning?

. . . . .

I was really enthusiastic about a workshop I went to on team teaching. I thought I might really improve the learning in my classroom. I finally cornered my principal and explained it to him. If I wanted a chance to try this program and get some outside help, he had to be involved from the beginning, right? I'd really admired this man, but I saw a side of him I hadn't seen before, pure negativism. He said, "Why don't you try it with one team?" I just kept looking at him blankly. I gave him preliminary research I'd done and he took it home over the weekend, and on Monday he said to me, "Well, I'm not so sure; why don't you try it with one team?" I couldn't believe my ears. He said he'd read it but I suspect he hadn't.

. . . . .

The only reason I decided to stay was that everyone said, "Please stay; it's going to get better. We're going to have a new principal next year." In 5 years they've had four different principals. When I started they asked if I had clear educational objectives. Sure I did, but how could I carry them out? All the principal cared about was peace. You could do anything you wanted as long as he didn't hear about it and nobody complained.

. . . . .

My principal accused me of wanting my kids to eat lunch in the park, where there have been demonstrations and rioting, when we planned a field trip to the anthropology museum. I said, "You're out of your mind; that's the last place I'd want myself or my students to be." But I'd made *Walden* available and he was sure I was teaching civil disobedience and subverting the kids. He put it all together and came out with, "We're having militancy among the sixth grade teachers and I'm going to get rid of some people."

. . . . .

A parent made a big noise about my giving her kid *Catcher in the Rye* and I went to my principal for support, first thing. He's just a windbag. He's like a liberal hurricane blowing out

of the north till the problems come. Then he suddenly clams up. We had this big intellectual discussion about books, but it was plain, no *Catcher*. I went to the district head of curriculum and he suggested books I should use instead of *Catcher*, thinking they were all new to me, and I'd read every one of them. In every instance I showed him how they didn't approach *Catcher*, but no, according to him I couldn't use it. So I went and got legal advice and found out that he had lied to me. And my principal had lied to me as well.

. . . . . .

Do you know how tenuous the position is of the administrators who might support a teacher? The opening speech in our district from our superintendent and from a consultant was, "The Use of Provocative Material," and the words were well selected. He might as well have said, "If you teach it and it gets *us* in trouble, we'll fire you the best way we can."

. . . . . .

Our superintendent's opening words were, "We'll stand behind you in anything you attempt to do as long as you exercise your own good judgment." He said he'd lose his credential before any teacher does, if what is done is seen as right. He meant it. He means it. I had an interview with him and he met me at the door with Plato's *Republic* in his hand and we just talked about the *Republic*. That's the kind of man he is. When I think of the principal I had before, I can't believe it. I feel like I'm still walking around in a daze.

. . . . . .

I was fighting with my principal every day. When my kids leave here they go to a school where lots of kids are on dope. My sixth grade boys know what's going on and they come to me after school for information about drugs. I have a friend in the D.A.'s office and I wanted him to come out and talk to the kids about drugs. I could relate it beautifully to the chapter on drugs and alcohol and health. The principal said, "No, absolutely not, not in this school." And I said, "What do I do?" It's like having a pregnant child in the room and saying, "I'm sorry; we can't have family life education." I said to him that these kids are coming to me right now for help. What do I think about all summer when they're going into that drug scene and they're asking me life and death questions right

now and using the right words? When I know where they can buy it? And they do too.

. . . . .

A lot of administrators are so uptight about race that it's ridiculous. I was putting out a little paper a while back for a district, directed at teachers—new ideas and stories about what other teachers were doing. One story said a sorority had taken a fourth grade class to a football game and to their house for punch and brownies afterward. My boss made me take out the word "brownies" and say "cookies."

. . . . .

I had to sit down with my principal on this pilot evaluation thing, and it was pretend and yet for real. He has these great objectives—every teacher has to know the level the kid's achieving at when he comes to you and you have to know how much growth has taken place at the end. Great, but I have 40 kids in my first period and we're on great terms but I rarely talk to each of them, really talk, once. I said, "Until you can get class size down, I won't sign this." We were kidding but he knew I meant it. *He* has all these great objectives that *I* as a teacher can't fulfill.

. . . . .

When I did the heredity unit I showed the film that's suggested in the book. It was like a cartoon, not real people, and it talked about twins and birth and mating. My principal said, "What's it all about?" I told him and he said, "When it gets to the word mating, flip off the projector and then flip it back on." I said nothing doing. I just sent it back. I'm not going to "bleep" the word mating.

. . . . .

I was very naive. At a faculty meeting I said, "I saw some packs of white pills being passed over desks and I thought I'd let you know." I was concerned about it and I still am. The principal said I should have talked to the administration about it first. He meant people who could isolate it. I kept talking about it and they called me "the drug man." Six teachers came to me and said, "We knew this was going on but we were afraid to say anything." I said to the principal, "Listen to these teachers." He said, "You shouldn't take such a dramatic

approach to these things." I said, "And the other phrases are 'don't make waves' and 'don't open cans of worms'—right?"

. . . . .

My principal denied a request to have a debate about Vietnam in our assembly. He said it was a poor day because it was the day of the moratorium. Administrative logic.

. . . . .

The way to handle principals, when they tell you to take off your peace symbols, your armbands, or whatever, is to say, "Will you please put that in writing?" In our district handbook it states that except for propagandizing in the classroom, you have the right to declare where you stand at any time as long as you make it clear that it is *your* opinion. So if you ask him to put his threats in writing, it may not do much but at least it keeps him away.

. . . . .

We had nine good units on sex education for parents. Two other teachers and I had gone through the workshop and we had set it up. It was going great. But the principal got upset about it after six units.

. . . . .

I got black looks because I took out some sex education materials in our district. The principal's secretary came looking and asked, "What did you *do* with them?" It seems you're not supposed to remove them unless the principal personally gives his approval. I said that I, and only I, had looked at them and asked if she wanted them back. She sighed with a great deal of perspiratory relief and went off with the security back in her arms.

. . . . .

My principal is like a crab—he can't go forward, only sideways or backward.

. . . . .

My principal lets the parents run the school through imagined fears. If he gets one phone call he comes in and says, "The phone's been ringing all day. What are you trying to do?"

The Staff

Why do older teachers treat new teachers the way they so often do? Maybe they just glory in their seniority. They feel they've earned it. I guess they have. If they feel threatened, which is the reason I've heard suggested, I can't imagine why. Just because they're old? We have a teacher who talks to herself constantly and steps on the kids' lunches on the floor beside their seats. One of my kids stepped on another kid's lunch one day and I gave him the whole spiel, you know, about food and the poor. The kids looked at me as if I were out of my mind. One boy popped up and said, "Mrs. S. steps on *everybody's* lunch." I couldn't believe it.

. . . . . .

How about their attitude toward materials? Our school had extra money from Title I, ESEA, and other projects. So we had a lot of teaching aids for reading, for math. They told me that when I came. But I'll be darned if I know where they all went. I don't have any. I looked in my cabinets and in the supply room and I asked the teacher assistant for reading development to try to find me some but nothing happened. Then I went into another teacher's classroom and saw four or five clock charts, chart hangers, sets of building blocks, magnet boards, felt boards and the things that go with them. So I got elected to the faculty advisor committee and brought it up. I had the other new teachers' support. It was the same with them. I just said, "Maybe we should have a general inventory of teaching materials and consider redistribution." No reaction, but the next day, wow! At a combined meeting I got both barrels from an older teacher—she has about 12 years of teaching experience—who thought I was attacking her personally. She gave me a 10-minute tirade about how when *she* started out she had to make her own materials and it wouldn't hurt us to do the same thing. All materials were assigned to her class, she was responsible for them, and she wouldn't give them up until the authorities told her to in writing. On and on, and when I left she was still whispering to the other teachers. I felt awful, but it wasn't for me that I had asked; it was for

me with my first graders. They have as much right to the help they can get as her kids.

. . . . .

Some of them are like a history teacher I had in high school. You know, I really admired her because there was never any question about what would happen in her class. You'd walk in, there'd be five questions on the blackboard, you'd read a certain number of pages and write the answers. You'd finish and look up and she'd say, "Are there any questions?" And as she said "questions" the bell would ring. I guess this was her way of controlling the classroom. Her performance and ours were predictable and there was minimal anxiety for her. Now I think that's awful—no exchange of information, no sharing, no real class or teaching.

. . . . .

It's funny, but two of my best friends on the faculty are straight authoritarian teachers, the kind that say they wish they could hit the kids. I laugh at them because that's so absurd, as if punching kids did anything but make the need for violence even greater. But when I walk into their classrooms I see that they're very much in touch with their kids. They're really communicating. They're telling jokes and the kids are having a great time. Those teachers are just as responsive to their kids as they are to me at the lunch table. When they come into my class they're shocked because it's so much more strict. Maybe philosophies have nothing to do with actual practice. When you get into the classroom, it's just people.

. . . . .

Some teachers have everything planned and just walk through it. They have the entire 40 or 50 minutes mapped out. If a kid says, "I'd like to talk more about this," they say, "First we have to finish all these other things," and that's it. Sure, tension and strain are reduced. Allowing spontaneity in yourself and your class is really fatiguing. But if you're a good teacher, I would think that you can't plan rigidly like that, or shouldn't.

. . . . .

It's substitutes I dread. We had one who did all the things that used to be done when I was a child. If a kid chewed gum she'd put it on his nose. I have kids on tranquilizers; who cares

if they chew gum? If it keeps them busy and works off some energy, that's great. It's better than what was going on when they weren't chewing gum. She caught a kid passing a note and she put it up on the bulletin board for everybody to read. When I came back the next day the kids said, "Why didn't you tell her we don't get all hung up about things like that? Why didn't you tell her that they aren't important in our room?" You can't tell a substitute that. But the kids knew what was important and what wasn't.

. . . . . .

I had a substitute the other day and when I came back the class applauded. They said, "She was a fanatic!" We use big words in our neighborhood. But it's a hard thing to get them all used to you and have some learning going on and then see what happens when they have to deal with a different kind of discipline.

. . . . . .

Some of the older teachers are terrific. One fellow who's been teaching in our school for 21 years now is brilliant. I classify him as a classroom genius. I go up and see him every time I have a problem. Sometimes I come up with an idea and he says, "Cancel it out." I ask why and he says, "It's been thought of before and here's what happened. . . ."

. . . . . .

There's a teacher in my school who has the most fantastic rapport with some of his most disturbed children because, for some reason, he has this physical thing with them. They come over to him and want to touch him. They're eighth graders but they want this nursery school thing. You know, when you want to touch the teacher you hit the teacher; that's one way to touch the teacher. Now this guy doesn't know a concept from a hole in the blackboard. He teaches the book, chapter by chapter. Progressive education, what's that? But I truly admire the rapport he has with those kids. I couldn't be like him and I wouldn't try, but his students have a strong sense of his presence.

. . . . . .

Counselors could be a lot more help if they weren't so busy, if they could give you some time. Because of the discipline problems in my class, I sent a number of kids to the counselor

at the beginning of the year. He couldn't do anything with them. Just too busy. Then I'd ask over and over again, "Please come to the classroom; I don't want to send kids out, but I do need someone to sit in the class for a while and help me out."

. . . . .

I had several run-ins with a counselor. In my class I could stand on my head, do a topless-bottomless act—it didn't matter what I did; I couldn't get them to act like students. I tried everything, including all the patience I could muster, before I sent kids to the counselor. I assumed it was understood that you sent kids to the counselor only when all your attempts in the classroom had failed. But the counselor assumed that it was because we were just bothered by the kids and wanted to get them off our hands. So a couple of times he sent back a child and said, "If you would try classroom discipline, you wouldn't have to send him to me." Boy, did I get angry.

. . . . .

There's a fantastic young guy running the cooling-off room in our school. It's really beautiful. It's more for kids who are really up during the day or upset or need to get out of their own rooms.

. . . . .

I'm so happy with the staff I'm with now that I can't believe it. I work with a principal and a psychologist and people who assume that I have a brain in my head and that I'm not just an idiot when it comes to handling something. The other teachers give me so much support. A weird thing happened one day. There's a fire extinguisher right near my door. I'm in a portable with no bells or phones to the main building. Some nutty kids in the reading lab next door took the fire extinguisher out, went "click," and shot a great big thing right into the metal shop window. The man who works there is hysterical under normal circumstances, and he came out with blood in his eye, yelling, "Who did that? I'll break their bloody fingers!" I decided quickly that we couldn't remember who did it. The principal, the custodian, and the fire commissioner all came over to see about the flap. The two teachers from the reading lab were just great. They said, "Gee, when you have an active bunch of kids and a fire extinguisher hanging right beside the

door like that, anything can happen." They were so supportive —they're just really good people.

. . . . .

I think the staff generally takes on a particular kind of attitude and atmosphere to get along with the principal. When there are two or three teachers in a school who are different, they leave. In the school I left, where I was so miserable, the principal didn't like me. I was different. Nineteen teachers who were different have left that school during the past 3 years. But when I was in the middle of it I couldn't see that. I just felt kind of peculiar.

. . . . .

In our school district we have a group of staff people—school psychologists, speech teachers, counselors, and the like —who have talked about having some kind of human rights committee. It would be a place where teachers could meet and really talk—air problems and share experiences. Wouldn't that kind of thing be great?

The Parents

Parents can back you into a corner and foist their discipline problems off on you. It's very discouraging. One mother came in the other day, and yelling about her son in a high whiney voice, on and on, about how he runs around and smokes and that he's going to be a delinquent—and it's all my fault, because I don't give him enough homework to keep him busy. So I said, "Well, your boy's OK in my class. I give what I consider enough homework. I'll give you some suggestions for extra work, but I'm sorry; I can't accept the responsibility for his discipline problems after school." And the kid doesn't even do all the homework I give him.

. . . . .

Sometimes when parents yell, they're crying for help. Last week a mother came in yelling and I just let her yell. I didn't even bother to try to get a word in. When they're that uptight, I value the fact that they're there trying to get it out and I let them carry it through. When she finally ran down, I went and got the Kleenex and said, "I'm really sorry that she's causing you all this difficulty." It was true. I was. And she was able to say, "What can I do about Helen?" She was asking for help. And we talked about it. I have the kid five hours a day so I figure I've got to deal with her total behavior.

. . . . .

If a mother comes to me and cries about her kid, we talk about what to do. But when one comes in and lays her problems all on me, that's something else. I give enough all day long and I'm pushing my limits.

. . . . .

The role of a parent is the most difficult role anybody undertakes in our society. And the fact that their kids come to your classroom puts them on the defensive. The teacher is the judge of their flesh and blood, the judge of their parenting—what they've made of the kid. Problems make them feel inadequate and guilty. If you can just make a positive relationship with them the first time, if they come to back-to-school night, or if you

call them up and say, "Hey, I'm really liking having Johnny in my class," then Johnny thinks it's going to be a great year and the parents do too. And then if there are problems, you can suggest working together to straighten them out and they don't feel you're out to get them.

. . . . .

Some parents do unbelievable things to their children because they can't look at them objectively. I like to have parents come and visit and sit in the room, but some of them sit right over the kid. One mother reached out and rapped her kid on the head because he wrote down the wrong thing. One parent jerked her child out into the hall because she was misbehaving, took the ruler and really whipped her. It was very demoralizing to my class, and to me. But I've got a 5-year-old boy and sometimes I catch myself doing stupid things if he catches me at a very wrong time.

. . . . .

I went to visit a home of a very disturbed child. The mother was anxious to show me that he could do something really well. I was standing on the porch talking with the father and she pushed the kid out the screen door, saying, "Go on, go on, show the teacher." And she stood behind the door with this big ruler in her hand. The poor little kid just stood there with tears rolling down his face. I said, "What is it, Kenny?" He said, "She wants me to say the time tables, and I can't." So I tried to explain to the mother that we don't teach the time tables in the first grade.

. . . . .

Some parents don't trust their kids. A high school junior came to me today. He took the mid-term; I know he did because I had to correct him for cheating. I don't know what happened to the exam; I haven't got it. So an incomplete went on his record, but he's been doing C work so I gave him a C average. I didn't make him take it over. Today he brought me a piece of paper and asked me to write a note of explanation to his parents and sign it. He said that otherwise his parents wouldn't believe him. How then, I wondered, are they going to know that this is my signature? It was kind of screwy.

. . . . .

It's tough when kids in junior high start rebelling against their parents and they come to you as a friend. They'll tell you what their father did and what their mother said last night, and that's when you have to be careful. You could say, "Oooh, that's terrible for you to talk like that." Or, you can say, "Uh-huh," and nod your head that you're listening, you understand, and maybe he'll take that as agreement. Or you could say, "Hey, hold on a minute; you're telling me they're giving you a real hard time. That's sure tough, but did you ever think of looking at this from your parents' point of view?" There are a lot of things you could say, but the kids put you in a position of choosing sides. It's "If you're for me, then you can't be for my parents." And that's not too far from the truth, because some parents have such a low view of their own kids.

. . . . .

The most agonizing thing that ever happened to me in teaching was with parents. Last summer I learned something about group processes and I thought it would help my class. I know that group process stuff can be dangerous but I only did harmless stuff. We did simple things such as lying on the floor, mentally exploring our bodies. Then we got up and walked around with our eyes closed. Parents started calling up asking that their kids be withdrawn from the class so they wouldn't be exposed to me. And a contingent of parents announced they were going to "take care" of me as soon as they got "their ammunition ready." And a month later a woman called up and said her daughter had had her blouse ripped off and all that guk. All lies, phoney. I had permission from my principal. I asked the parents to come and face me with their accusations and they refused. They said I was to go to one of their homes at 7 o'clock in the evening. I refused. I felt it was risky and would put me at a great disadvantage, with all those people ready to tear into me. I felt they could come and see me in my own environment where it concerned them, and on my terms. Nothing happened, and nobody ever said anything to me; they just took their kids out of my class. I was terribly upset.

. . . . .

Parent censorship—it's like fighting cobwebs in the dark. I gave a bright kid of mine my copy of *Catcher in the Rye* to read on the first day of school. Two days later my principal called and said that a parent wanted to see me. So I went in and we chatted small talk, and all of a sudden she whipped

my book out of her bag and said, "Did you give this to my child?" I said, "Yes, I think it's a great book." Her husband's a judge, so I figured these were educated people. Turns out she hadn't read beyond the first page which had the word "damn" on it. I was going to explain the concept of the book—that it's about a boy who realizes that obscenity is no way to deal with evil. It was like talking to the wall. So then she conned me into doing a terrible thing. I've felt guilty about it ever since. She said, "My son thinks you're one of the best teachers he's ever had. I don't want him to change that opinion, so I don't want him to know that I disapprove of you. I don't want him to read this book, so will you ask him to give it back?" I said, "OK." I thought I was doing the best thing. I didn't want a clash with parents. So the next day I told the boy that I needed the book and asked him to please bring it in. He brought it in. I didn't realize that I was betraying him. Of course his mother wanted him to find out that I betrayed him, and he did. I'd lied; I'd told him I'd promised it to a friend and then forgotten. It was a lesson, believe me. A painful one, but I'll never forget it.

. . . . .

My dealings with parents have been very different. I've never had a problem where a parent has blamed me for anything. I always end up telling parents to take it easy on the kids. One of my kids wrote four-letter words in all his compositions. On back-to-school night the folders were there on the desks for the parents to read, and even though I'd taken most of them out, you know, there were some of these four-letter words in this kid's composition. The parent gets mad—really charged up, ready to go back and kill his kid. I said, "Oh, this is nothing; this is a phase; every kid in the room has done this now and then." I said, "When I read these compositions I just tell them that it's boring to have all those words in." He simmered down.

. . . . .

It's not easy to deal with parents when they see you as a corrupter of youth and you see yourself as a teacher trying to widen a kid's horizons. It's a weird position to find yourself in. Your training and professionalism make you want to go ahead and introduce them to books, authors, ideas. But your training also tells you that you should respect and work with parents. You feel guilty doing something with a student that his parents

oppose. You feel uneasy about giving in to stupidity and prejudice. It's not easy.

. . . . . .

I usually have the problem of parents coming in and telling me how they really get on the kids—stand over them doing their homework, check their work, make a big fuss over grades, give them flack over everything having to do with school. My response is usually one of, "Well, you know, he's really a good kid; he's fine in my class. Maybe you should ease up."

The System

The system isn't the school, it isn't the principal, it isn't even the superintendent and the board of education. It's above and beyond and below all those, although they're part of it. It's the politicians saying that we have to start drug education in first grade but we can't have sex education in high school. It's the outraged citizens' groups who censor our teaching. It's the college professors who give us our textbooks. It's all those people out there doing our talking. What it's not, for sure, is us —teachers.

. . . . .

The principal may not be the system, but he sure can put my job on the line. Mine let me know that when I had a hassle with him. I said, "Go ahead, fire me." I don't have tenure, but that didn't bother me. They have to do the same thing to fire you when you're untenured as when you have it. I was so ticked off that I said, "Go ahead, fire me, and see the book I'll write about this place!" And he thinks, "She's an intellectual"—he's told people that he thinks I'm an intellectual—"She might really write a book." It's so ridiculous. He's so full of bluff. He won't fire me. But he could get me transferred fast, really fast.

. . . . .

They can transfer you without any reason. If the principal wants you transferred and puts it in writing, away you go. You can be transferred simply because you're a liberal and he's a conservative. Or because some organization gets on his back. Or he doesn't like your eyes. And there's no grievance committee for transfers. If you're fired, then you can go to the grievance committee, but not if you're transferred. All he has to say is he doesn't like your attitude.

. . . . .

A new teacher transferred to our school last year at the end of the year. In April her evaluation was great. In May she disagreed with the principal. He said, "Don't plan to come back

here." This was at 9 o'clock in the morning and she came out of there in tears and had to teach for the rest of the day. As far as she knew, she had no job. The personnel manager called her, told her the names of three schools and their principals, and suggested that she go see them. If they want you transferred and you're under contract, you can go for an interview and find yourself in a new classroom. Now it's me. He said to somebody who told me, "I'm getting rid of her." I've gone to all the legal places I can go to, including his boss. They say, "We know this is a problem." My friends ask me why I don't transfer. But why should I? This is my first job. I have good evaluations, good recommendations. Maybe the personnel manager will transfer me to some principal who will like me.

. . . . .

The principals are under pressures. Do you realize the number and range of organizations that they have to respond to? Well organized, very conscientious, vocal. They have to deal with people who want to be involved in the curriculum. There was a call to our school last week: "I hear you're going to have a film on natural childbirth today." She was told she'd heard wrong. The film was about frogs. "I don't hear wrong," she said, and when the film went on, there she was. She got bored to death by the frogs.

. . . . .

One of our teachers presented a book called *Coping* which is a Gateway Series book. All the ghetto schools have it and it's good. Apparently interracial marriage came up and they discussed pros and cons. The principal called her in and told her a man, not a father of one of her kids, wanted to speak to her away from the school at 7 o'clock that night. The principal's a professed liberal and while he was telling her how liberal he was, he was making the point that she'd better not have anything else to do that night. He'd go with her to see this guy at 7 o'clock that night. The guy represented a whole political contingent in our area. The teacher, Phyllis, told us about it in the teachers' room and we all said. "You can't do this; it's outrageous. Call your lawyer; call your union!" Finally we picked her up and set her down at the telephone and told her to dial the principal. She told him she felt too insecure to meet this man that night. And he said, "Oh, great, I'm glad that's your feeling because it's mine too. Now let me call What's-his-name." And she'd been ready to go because he gave

her this stuff about the superintendent expecting it, and she thought her job was on the line.

. . . . .

I'm grateful to the union. I joined the day after the crisis with the parent over *Catcher in the Rye*. They found out about all the legal machinations and made me feel really secure. There are certain laws that apply to credentials. After all, teaching is a privilege, not a right in the legal sense.

. . . . .

Some of the laws are becoming more tentative and hazy every day, making it easier for the State to take away your credentials. And some of them are 60 years old. Like a law that it's illegal for a *teacher* to drive without a driver's license.

. . . . .

Or the law that says it's illegal for a teacher to live with someone of the opposite sex without marriage. I was warned on that one. I'm getting married to a girl on my faculty and we've been living together for quite a while. People warned me, "Hey, you can get fired." So I said, "OK, for them to find out that we're living together they'll have to invade my private life." Is that legal? And by the way, there are homosexuals on our faculty—who are very good teachers. If they're found out, their jobs are on the line. The circumstances under which the firing's done can be unbelievable. A teacher in another school, not mine, got fired on the basis of a phony story of his soliciting in another city when he could prove he wasn't even there. It took him 2 years in the courts before he proved it, and it didn't get him his job back.

. . . . .

There's a teacher on our faculty who was fired immediately from his last school because one of his students brought a bottle of champagne on the last day of school and he said, "Fine, let's all have a sip." He didn't lose his credential but he got the axe. He was either totally ignorant of the law that says it is illegal to serve liquor to minors and that it is illegal to serve liquor even to adults on school grounds, or he was just stupid. If he had actually said to them, "Why don't you bring some champagne," it would have been a different matter. But maybe he could appeal, if it was just a simple mistake.

. . . . .

I need to know more about the laws because I have this responsibility to my kids for their personality and sexual adjustment. Many of my girls might be or have been in trouble. Two were raped on the school grounds by other students who had taken advantage of girls who are quite retarded. I talked to one of them in the presence of the principal and her parents afterward and she didn't understand what had happened, even though she'd been through it. But the school won't allow me to get parents' approval for a sex education course with four girls, a nurse, and a counselor. It's against county policy, they say. The *law* says you can teach it and any parent who objects may withdraw his child. But the superintendent is going beyond that point and making an administrative decision.

. . . . .

You can appeal those decisions if you go to court or get a parent to protest. The point is that we're working under the superintendent and he's saying, "Let's cool it, as far as sex is concerned; don't talk about it." And we say, "What about our responsibility to our kids? To our retarded kids? Where else are they going to get the information? What do we do? How do we face that?" So what constitutes a litigation for a teacher? Does the school district have to file a suit or legal action against you as one private citizen would sue another private citizen?

. . . . .

I want to know why children can be taught about the ugliness of drugs but not the naturalness of sex. Is sex that ugly? Uglier than drugs? What a philosophy. . . .

. . . . .

Why aren't there courses in schools of education aimed directly at the legal status of the teacher in the system? Most teachers know neither their rights nor the range of their responsibility to students or administrators. In courses in law you study laws that apply to kids, not teachers. Maybe it's because we don't like to think of our jobs in terms of adversary roles to parents or the school administration.

. . . . .

We need to know which organizations really help the teacher and which ones are nothing, so that we won't join, join, join at the beginning of the year.

. . . . .

We have to do what we have to do, and if there's a hassle—fight. Fight the people who want to fight you, not your kids. Unless you want to go in your room and close the door and just survive.

Themselves as Teachers

I have a pretty definite image of what I think a good teacher is. I grew up in a family where education was a byword and I was always going to be a teacher. I didn't go through teacher education. I went into the Peace Corps and then came back, and I'll have my credential at the end of this teaching year. But now I don't know. There are so many stresses.

. . . . .

I want to build a math course with a whole new concept. The hangup is, Why wasn't I properly trained for teaching? Why did I have to discover so much on the job? Have I messed up kids because I couldn't recognize those things I should have been able to see—nutritional factors, family and emotional factors? How do I convey knowledge to a child so that he can understand it, and can get a good feeling about himself? So he can have a success to build on? I don't have the training to do it. I go home with these things troubling me.

. . . . .

When I feel as though I'm caught in a bind, I follow my own professional judgment. For instance, with censorship. I don't resist it, but I tell my kids about it. I say, "There's a book I'm not allowed to talk about in class. I can mention title and author, that's all. Do you want to know what it is?" They say, "Yeah, what is it? Is it dirty?" I say, "I'm not allowed to discuss it. It's on the list of the paperback book club you belong to." I had about 35 orders for it, and under normal circumstances I'd never have gotten the kids to read it. I say, "It's up to you and your parents to decide what to do." I always tell my kids about censorship.

. . . . .

I teach math. That means I teach logically—one, two, three —with reasons for everything. I give tests. I give surprise quizzes. I have days when I teach about following instructions. I write out the instructions—physical things such as "Jump up and tap your head three times." When I give a quiz I stress

to the kids, especially the college-bound kids, that they'd better get used to tests and quizzes. I give the tests on the honor system, maybe because I cheated so much myself in high school. During a test I'll go to the faculty room and have a cigarette and coffee.

. . . . .

You teach French; you teach math. OK, but you see the social system, the pills, the things that are going on, and you say to yourself, "What in heaven's name am I supposed to do?" You see something in the hall and say, "Well, that's not my job; let someone else worry about it—principals, counselors. It's no good. What do I do as a teacher?"

. . . . .

When the kids are talking, they say to each other, "What does your teacher think?" If you haven't taken a stand, they say, "Oh, my teacher doesn't care." . . . I think there should be certain adults in high school who have responsibility for answering questions about what goes on in the social system.

. . . . .

How far does my responsibility as a teacher go? Suppose a pregnant girl comes to you for help, asks you for the name of an abortionist? God forbid that you should give her a name; you can't do that on civil grounds. It's not the teacher's business. It's up to the parent. But the girl may feel she can't talk to the parent. Or she doesn't have any. Then it comes to counseling—if you have a counselor who's not too busy. And if the girl doesn't say, "Oh, I could never talk with him!" Boy, with adolescents. . . .

. . . . .

With adolescents the problems are very different. I have first graders who have a different religion from mine. Some of them cannot salute the flag. They're not allowed to. Their parents say they are not to salute the flag. As a teacher, I have nothing to say about it. My responsibility is for their education.

. . . . .

What are we asking for? For some of the things that might really help us. We need a course on teachers' legal rights. Maybe we need a good educational psychology course, one

that deals with ourselves and other people. Do the psychologists have the answers? I really don't know. I'm trying. I'm taking a course right now from a gal who's a psychologist and also a marriage counselor. She's a four-time loser. Maybe that's how she got to be a marriage counselor.

. . . . .

We do our trying in different ways. I take kids from other classes to help other teachers. We don't have a crisis room as some schools do for kids who can't cope. When a kid just can't last or comes to school high, what are you going to do with him? You can't send him home; you can't just let him go. There has to be a place for him to sit. That's what I try to provide without making other teachers angry. I have a developmental reading class where kids can do puzzles, games, study, or what not. A kid comes and says, "I just got thrown out of class. Can I come in here?" He knows. Word gets around. So I write a note to his teacher and say, "He's welcome here for reading with your approval." They initial it and I save it because I don't want to get in trouble later. This is a new situation in our school. Last week I had a girl who had an overdose of "reds." She said she was too jumpy to go from room to room all day, so she just spent the day in my room. I'm a teacher; I teach. I'm a human, I see a human need; I respond to it.

. . . . .

What really bugs us, it seems to me, is that we don't know how to help the difficult kids—disturbed and aggressive kids, handicapped kids, kids unmotivated to learn. It keeps me up nights. If we knew how to deal with these problems, *as teachers*, I think our others wouldn't be so bad.

. . . . .

We all feel strongly about the serious problems with students. We sound flippant about drugs but we know it's a life and death matter and we don't know what to do about it. As an elementary teacher I wish we could get concerned with the kids' difficulties now, before they get more dramatic and critical when they're adolescents.

. . . . .

I have to be recognized as a human being. Lots of people working in schools don't like to do that. Maybe working in schools does that to you. But if somebody says to me, "Gee,

you have good rapport with this kid," or, "That was a good job you did"—boy, I do 20 more good things! I don't mean criticism; I mean *praise*! Maybe that's one thing we could do for each other.

. . . . .

That's the biggest thing I've learned about my own feelings this year. I thought I was self-sufficient, that being true to my own values was the most important thing. But it can be a really lonely thing, too.

. . . . .

Listening to all these feelings I realize I have an edge over some of you. I'm not boasting, but it's true. I started teaching later than you and I'm more comfortable financially. The job doesn't scare me. I can get fired. The kids that interest me are the nonlearners. I've openly criticized the textbooks. I told the principal the other day that I wanted an air-conditioner for my room. He said, "You can't have it." I said, "OK, I'll buy one myself." Which adds up, maybe, to mean that if we're vulnerable, worrying about our jobs, we're less forceful, less direct. I don't say I'm a better teacher because of this. But I can approach my teaching with more certainty, less worry.

. . . . .

The sharing we've done in these meetings has strengthened me. I was frightened at first at how you stood up to other teachers, old ones, and to principals and parents. I feel now that I don't have to be buffaloed by these mythical ogres. They're just people. And I'm a person too and I have a right to my own feelings as a human; they're not something to be kept separate from my role as teacher.

. . . . .

I want to be a good teacher. I don't feel that I always *am* a good teacher, I must confess. I really don't.

. . . . .

We all want to be good teachers. And we're all nervous and we all have our share of hangups. We've found out the hard way that we're untaught to teach and most certainly not prepared to mold. That was hard for me to face. Now that I know

it, what happens? Do I run? Or hang in there and try to learn how to teach?

. . . . . .

If new teachers could have groups like this one, wouldn't that be a great help? A group that would meet not to make judgments. But to look at each other and our different techniques and styles without making judgments. To be able to talk about our feelings. . . .

. . . . . .

We need groups like this if we don't want to die or dry up professionally. Just sitting and griping with other new teachers doesn't do it—just agreeing that the situation is unhappy. We need reactions to tell if we're getting a clinical view. That's very important.

. . . . . .

You know what was most important? We felt safe to discuss whatever we wanted; we felt safe.

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1973 O - 500-585

DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
HEALTH SERVICES AND MENTAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH
5600 FISHERS LANE
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20852

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for private use, $300

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF H.E.W.
HEW 396

NOTICE OF MAILING CHANGE

☐ Check here if you wish to discontinue receiving this type of publication.

☐ Check here if your address has changed and you wish to continue receiving this type of publication. (Be sure to furnish your complete address including zip code.)

Tear off cover with address label still affixed and send to:

Printing and Publications Management
National Institute of Mental Health
5600 Fishers Lane (Rm. 6-105)
Rockville, Maryland 20852

DHEW Publication No. (HSM)73-9032
Printed 1973

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

National Institute of Mental Health